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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that a child's family is his or her first and most important teacher, this technical assistance paper stresses the importance of preschool teachers involving the family in the development of the child. It examines the fundamental principles that guide the creation of a partnership with parents and some of the objectives of building the family-school partnership. Four steps are identified that help in implementing an effective plan for involving families: (1) determining resources within and outside the school for implementing a Family Involvement Program; (2) getting to know the families; (3) devising a plan of action based on available resources and knowledge of the families; and (4) designing a calendar and formalizing plans. Strategies that can be used to build relationships with families are discussed, such as parent conferences, home visits, bulletin boards, notes, newsletters and handbooks. Mention is made of special considerations for families with special needs children. A sample parent conference sheet and newsletter as well as guidelines for parent conferences are included. Contains eight additional resources and seven references. (BAC)

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KENTUCKY PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Building An Effective Family-School Partnership

ED 379 104

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Case Scenario

Ms. Johnson was apprehensive during the summer which preceded her son's participation in the local public school's new program for four-year-old children. Jeremy was the first child in her family to enter public school and her friends knew little about the four-year-old program. Most had never been inside the elementary school some twelve miles away. Yes, she was excited about the idea of Jeremy riding the school bus and being so far away. She would have no way to go to him if he needed her. The family day care home where Jeremy stayed while she worked, was operated by a woman she had known most of her life, and she could always depend on the woman to let her know if Jeremy had had a good day. Although Jeremy would return to the family care home for part of the day, who would tell her about his experiences at school?

Fortunately, Ms. Johnson's concerns and questions were acknowledged. During the summer, Jeremy's teacher, Ms. Patrick, sent Jeremy a note to let him know how much she looked forward to his being in her classroom in the fall. She even came to visit before school started so she could get to know Jeremy and his mother. Ms. Johnson attended a parent orientation meeting at the beginning of school and met other families and learned more about the "hands-on" activities which Jeremy would be doing at school. It was amazing how much Jeremy would learn by playing with blocks, paints, and all the other children! A weekly newsletter helped her know what unit Jeremy was learning about at school, when she needed to send materials for activities, and even helped her learn some of the songs Jeremy brought home from school. She described Jeremy's progress and suggested some children's books which Jeremy might like for her to read with him at home. Ms. Johnson had not realized that by reading to Jeremy, she was helping him learn to read. She also attended a parent meeting about guiding children's behavior. The ideas really helped when Jeremy was so stubborn about dressing for school on time! Because she worked during the day, she had little time to spend as a volunteer helping in the classroom, but she had been able to make some simple games at home which Ms. Patrick needed for the children. Jeremy had been so pleased to take the games to school and she was glad to help. Ms. Johnson knew she was being a good mother for Jeremy and felt a part of his first school experience.

Introduction

"Teachers who work to involve all families recognize that even though they, as teachers, hold a special place in the lives of children, it is the young child's family which plays the most critical role in the child's development for within each family are the child's first and most important teachers" (Springate, 1991, p.27). As professionals, we have long recognized the invaluable role which parents play in the growth and development of the young child. Current research continues to establish the critical importance of the role of parents in the

Most interactions with parents are informal such as the interaction that occurs when parents bring and pick up children from the classroom.

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educational process. In the forward of Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985), Robert Glaser noted, "The parent and the home environment teach the child his or her first lessons and they are the first teacher of reading too" (p.vi.).

Under the best of circumstances, the role of the family in the growth and development of the young child can be overwhelming. The family is responsible for:

- assuring that the child's basic needs are met;
- acquiring preventive health care as well as care when the child is ill;
- securing appropriate and safe child care;
- detecting possible delays or abnormalities in development, seeking appropriate services for the child, and serving as an advocate for the child;
- offering a home environment conducive to learning and being responsive to the child's needs for guidance, consistency, and support;
- nurturing the child's self-esteem; and
- serving as a positive role model for living and learning.

These responsibilities may fall on family members who have little preparation for parenting and few resources to assist them in this tremendous responsibility. For many, the task of parenting often leads to a sense of failure and frustration not only for the adult, but for the child who does not meet the demands and expectations of the parent.

The Basics Of Involving Families

Teachers can offer the family support which will assist them in meeting the needs of their children and in feeling good about themselves as parents. The healthy self-esteem of the child is a reflection of the healthy self-esteem of the parent. The family can serve as a valuable resource in providing insight about the child and his/her home life which will assist the teacher in planning appropriate instructional strategies for each child. **EFFECTIVE TEACHING CANNOT OCCUR IN ISOLATION OF THE CHILD'S FAMILY.**

Guiding Principles

There are several very fundamental principles which must be incorporated into plans for becoming "partners with parents". These principles are as follows:

1. The period of life from birth through age five is most significant in terms of developing a positive self-esteem, positive attitudes toward schooling, and the ability to engage in positive social interactions. This time is truly a "foundation" for the child's life.
2. Education involves the TOTAL CHILD. Schools and parents must address physical, cognitive, social, creative and emotional strengths and needs.
3. It is essential that detection of potential developmental delays or disabilities and appropriate intervention strategies occur at the earliest possible time in the child's life, rather than waiting for the child to reach the primary grades. Early detection and intervention may prevent retention, placement in special education classrooms, and a child's ultimate sense of failure.
4. Families who have low income levels should not be characterized as incompetent or uncaring with respect to the care and educational needs of their children.
5. Families and children must be treated with respect.
6. Teachers must observe professional ethics in discussing the characteristics, strengths, and needs of individual families and children. Only when the family's right to privacy is observed will trust be established and communication achieved.
7. Being "at-risk" because of income level does not determine that the child will have educational or learning disabilities.
8. The child who is at risk for educational difficulties or who has identifiable disabilities is like all children in his/her need for love and acceptance, positive self-esteem, and feelings of success.
9. Regardless of being labeled "at-risk", having disabilities, or being a typically developing child, ALL CHILDREN LEARN BEST THROUGH PLAY WITH CONCRETE MATERIALS (Hendrick, 1988).

Objectives

With these principles in mind, the building of the family-school partnership has many objectives including, but not limited to, the following:

1. acquiring information from the family relative to their concerns about the child, the program, and their role in the child's growth and development;
2. building the rapport with families which will support effective long-term communication;
3. agreeing upon a plan of action for the type of program, activities, and guidance techniques which address the strengths and needs of the child at home and at school;
4. informing families about the types and purposes of activities in which the child will participate;
5. empowering families in their role through information relating to parenting techniques, health and safety, community resources, and basic child development; and
6. utilizing the skills of the family as resources for the classroom and school (Hendrick, 1988).

The importance of the child's family must be recognized before a program can adequately meet the needs of the child.

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Strategies

There are many strategies which can be utilized in involving families. In the opening scenerio, the teacher, Ms. Patrick, clearly made attempts to involve Jeremy's mother in the life of her young child at school through a variety of one-way communication techniques, such as notes and newsletters, and two-way communication techniques, such as home visits, parent orientation and information meetings, and parent conferences. By involving Ms. Johnson in the simple task of making games, Ms. Patrick provided an opportunity for the parent to experience a sense of worth by making a needed contribution to her son's classroom.

Successful and meaningful family involvement activities do not simply happen. They should be carefully planned with regard to specific objectives, needs of the families, and resources available. Consider the following general steps to prepare to implement an effective plan for involving families.

STEP 1:

Determine Resources for Implementing a Family Involvement Program

- Explore resources within the school community. A district reference library may be available with pertinent resource materials. If not, check the local public and university/college libraries. Talk with other teachers who actively involve families for their suggestions. Discuss ideas with a supervisor.
- Explore print materials provided within the journals and publications of professional organizations. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publishes excellent books, pamphlets, and a journal entitled Young Children. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) also publishes a useful journal entitled Teaching Exceptional Children. The Southern Association on Children Under Six (SACUS) also has excellent materials available in the journal, Dimensions. The local affiliate of SACUS, KACUS, publishes an annual journal, Kaleidescope, which may also be helpful.
- Visit your Early Childhood Regional Training Center to view the wealth of family support information housed in their library or with a Parent Resource Center. Professionals on staff can also provide resources relative to parent education models and additional school and community resources. A supervisor can provide information relative to the location and staff of the local Regional Training Center.
- Research community resources such as the library, health department, Comprehensive Care Centers, Department of Social Services, and Kentucky Department of Education, which might be of assistance in providing information about resource persons, local workshops, and print materials.
- Talk with instructors who teach courses relative to family involvement at local colleges and universities. Such courses are generally housed in the areas of Home Economics or Education.

STEP 2:

Know the Families

- Determine the composition of the family. (For example, the child's parent(s) may be one or both natural parents, adoptive, or foster parents; grandmother and/or grandfather; uncle and/or aunt; or an older sibling who has assumed the parenting responsibility for the child.) Also determine the number and ages of other children in the home. The family may have preconceived notions about school through the experience of an older child. It may be necessary to explore child care options for children requiring supervision during parent meetings and conferences.
- Consider the job responsibilities of family members. If both parents are employed during the day, make home visits and plan other parent activities in the late afternoon or evenings. Find alternate ways for these families to serve as classroom resources. Be sure to make every attempt to include both mothers and fathers.
- Determine the number of families who could provide their own transportation to school events. Carpools may be a consideration.
- Know the families with respect to educational experiences, opportunities, and capabilities.

STEP 3:

Using resources available, knowledge of the families, and input from the families, devise a plan of action for the school year. It should include:

- Home Visits
- Parent Conferences
- Parent/Family Bulletin Board
- Parent Information Meetings
- Handbook
- Family Volunteer Program
- Newsletters
- Notes or Happy Grams
- Family Social Events
- Informal contacts with families via daily face-to-face and phone conversations.

STEP 4:

Design a calendar in accordance with the school policies and procedures and formalize plans with an appropriate supervisor.

Techniques For Involving Families

Employ a variety of strategies in efforts to build home-school relationships with families. Those involving two-way communication, such as parent conferences and home visits, are most effective as both parent and teacher actually experience the reactions of the other. Both parties, the teacher and the family, have an opportunity to listen and to express needs, concerns, thoughts, and feelings. Specific techniques will be presented later in the document for planning and implementing the following strategies characterized by two-way communication: home visits, parent meetings, parent conferences, and parent volunteer programs.

In methods involving one-way communication, the teacher or person providing information is unable to see or determine the responses of the parent or person receiving the information. While not as effective, these methods are necessary because it is not feasible to talk with all parents on a daily and perhaps even weekly basis when children are transported by bus to school. Strategies will be presented later in the document for these techniques, which include: bulletin boards, newsletters, happy grams, and handbooks.

Home Visits

A home visit is an excellent tool for building rapport with the family early in the school year and the first visit should be conducted before school starts or within the first 60 days. Visits should continue on a regular basis throughout the year. The teacher has an opportunity to get to know both the parent and child in the home setting where family members are most comfortable. In this non-threatening envi-

The teacher establishes the classroom climate that encourages parents to participate. Here a parent assists an activity that is fun and creative.

ronment, the family should feel more comfortable in asking questions and expressing concerns about the upcoming school experience. Every effort should be made to schedule the visit when both parents, if appropriate, are at home. Visits will need to accommodate the work schedules of the family member(s) responsible for the child.

Keep in mind the home visit serves a broader purpose than the completion of school records. In addition to establishing rapport with the family, the home visit affords the teacher an opportunity to get to know the child so the child will be more comfortable in coming to the school and so the teacher will know something about the types of activities which might suit the child's needs. The home visit also provides an opportunity for assessing the strengths and needs of the family in working with the child and modeling ways for parents to engage in simple learning activities with the child at home.

In preparation for the home visit, develop a home visit kit. A basket or box with a cover or lid is helpful for transporting materials and keeping materials out of the child's view until you are ready to use them. As an example, place the following materials in the basket.

- a camera (You may want to prepare the parent for picture-taking activities when the home visit is scheduled.),
- a book such as My Nursery School by Harlow Rockwell,
- a simple manipulative game or puzzle,
- some markers and paper, and
- something special to leave with the child such as a ball of playdough.

During your visit you can read the book or ask the parent to read the book with the child if the parent or family member is comfortable in doing so. You can engage the child in the game or puzzle and in drawing with the markers and pen. (You may want to suggest the child draw a picture of his/her new school.) These activities will give you some idea of the child's previous experiences and interest in books, feelings about going to school, attention span and fine motor and problem solving skills. While the child is working with materials, you can talk with the parent about the coming year. If you have brief, printed information about your program, you might like to leave the material with the family.

Before leaving, take a picture of the child at home which you can display in your classroom during the first weeks of school. The pictures help other children get to know their new friends and help each child feel more comfortable in the new setting. Leave the ball of dough as a reminder of a fun visit and things to come at school.

As visits are made throughout the year, consider the following guidelines:

1. Accept the family and the home.
2. Assess the existing skills of the parent and build on those skills.
3. Build parent confidence by offering honest praise and positive suggestions for change.
4. Talk in language which the parent will understand, but which does not belittle the parent. Do not dominate the conversation.
5. Focus on the child's strengths prior to addressing needs.
6. Offer suggestions for parent-child activities which are inexpensive and involve lots of parent-child verbal interaction. Stress the importance of reading with the child daily.
7. Encourage the parent to describe his/her needs as a parent.
8. Admit you do not have all the answers, but attempt to locate appropriate information.
9. During the visit:
   - request the television be turned off;
   - ask for a set space for working with the parent and child such as the kitchen table;
   - encourage both parents to participate;
   - complete activities in an hour or less; and
   - model activities with the child, involve the parent as teacher, and give encouragement to both parent and child.

Meetings

The parent meeting may be planned for the specific purpose of orienting parents to the school program, providing information to assist families in enhancing parenting skills, or as a social occasion to celebrate a holiday or important school event. To insure as many families attend as possible, it is important to assess the needs of families as parent meetings are planned with respect to:

- convenient days and times for meetings,
- need for child care,
- transportation difficulties, and
- topics of critical importance.

This assessment can be conducted verbally as teachers talk with parents and make home visits or in printed questionnaire format. If a printed questionnaire is chosen, keep it simple and brief so that parents do not need to spend a great deal of time writing. This will help to assure the return of the forms. In planning a parent education meeting, list several topics suggested by parents from which the families may choose. Selecting a series of parent training modules, such as Parents Are Teachers, Too! (Springate & Warner, 1990), may be helpful! The modules address nutrition, developmental characteristics, guidance, health care, and home learning activities, and are available at the Early Childhood

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Regional Training Centers. Gather materials relative to family stress, self-esteem, beginning literacy, and choosing quality care.

At the parent orientation meeting, discuss your program and policies, disseminate a handbook, and answer pertinent questions of parents. A slide show or video depicting the daily events of the program will be helpful in explaining the purpose and content of the program to families. Discuss plans for family involvement. A guided tour of the prepared classroom will also be helpful.

Whether parent meetings are conducted by the teacher or by a resource person, the following guidelines should be utilized:

1. Set specific goals for each meeting. Share the goals with the parents at the beginning of the meeting. Also share an organized agenda with the participants.
2. Begin and end meetings on time. Meetings should not exceed one or one and one-half hours.
3. Assist participants in getting acquainted. They should have access to nametags and be able to participate in a non-threatening and simple get-acquainted activity. Perhaps sharing an anecdote about their children's favorite activity at school along with their names and the names of their children would be appropriate.
4. Make the physical setting comfortable. The lighting, temperature, and seating arrangements should be considered. Parents are more likely to talk with each other if chairs are clustered for eye contact versus simply arranged in lecture style. Use adult-sized chairs.
5. Two-way communication should prevail. Parents should be encouraged to participate through techniques such as informal group discussions and brainstorming sessions. Presentations which rely solely on a lecture format are very inappropriate.
6. Parents should be given ample opportunities to ask questions at the close of the meeting.
7. Evaluate each meeting using comments and concerns of the participants. Simple, one-page written evaluations help insure privacy. However, if the parents have difficulty with literacy, oral comments will suffice.

Parent Conferences

Scheduled parent conferences should be held at least twice during the school year to afford parents and teachers uninterrupted time to discuss the strengths and needs of the child and to determine how the child's growth can best be nurtured both at home and school. This is also a time for the teacher to share concrete information about the child's progress at school. During the year, the teacher should collect samples of the child's art work, dictated stories and comments, and written anecdotes from his or her daily interactions with materials, children, and adults. Generally speaking, the teacher's careful observation of the child engaged in activity is the best method of assessment. The teacher must be acutely aware of developmental norms in all areas of development, i.e., cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative, in order to make judgments about the child's progress, strengths, and needs.

In addition to a folder containing organized examples of the child's daily life at school (Refer to **Assessing Development, Technical Assistance Paper #2**), a conference sheet is helpful in discussions with parents. The conference sheet may be organized as indicated in Figure 1.

Expand items in the conference sheet as suited to the goals and objectives of the program. Do remember that many parents are not aware of the appropriate focus of the early childhood classroom and may be expecting a "report card" and discussion of the child's progress in very academic areas. The conference is an excellent time to explain the value of hands-activities and the role of play. See Figure 1 for additional guidelines in preparing for parent-teacher conferences.

If the child has a speech or other disability, the teacher will be asked to participate in all Admissions and Release Committee meetings where the services the child is to receive will be discussed with the parent. At this time, more formal measures of assessment will also be addressed. A school administrator is responsible for coordinating these meetings and assuring that procedures are followed. The teacher will be asked to participate and will play a vital role in insuring the activities planned are, in fact, developmentally appropriate for the child. Your district will provide additional instructions on your role in these conferences.

In preparing for parent-teacher conferences, utilize the general guidelines in Figure 2.

Diversity in families mandates diversity and flexibility in family involvement. Recognition of cultural diversity should help teachers make stronger home-school linkages.

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Conference Sheet

Name of Child _____

Age of Child: _____

Date of Conference: _____

Social-Emotional Development

Examples:
- self-direction
- peer interaction
- participation in group activity
- initiation of requests
- prosocial behaviors

Physical Development

Examples:
- climbs steps alternating feet
- hops on one foot
- masters simple obstacle course
- rides tricycle
- tosses ball overhand

Cognitive Development

Examples:
- names colors
- recognizes own first name
- counts objects one to five
- engages in simple problem solving

Creative Development

Examples:
- engages in simple dramatic play
- enjoys painting with easel brush and other media
- draws simple shapes and a simple face
- uses imagination in daily interactions with materials and people
- enjoys simple songs and rhythm activities

Summary of strengths: _____

_____

Summary of needs: _____

_____

Suggested activities: _____

_____

Teacher's Signature: _____

Figure 1. ***A sample parent conference sheet***

Family volunteers

Parents and other family members, such as grandparents, can be very effective as volunteers within the classroom. Volunteers lend support to the classroom teacher and build their knowledge about child development, guidance, and appropriate learning activities. At the parent orientation meeting and during home visits, discuss a volunteer program and the activities which might be involved. Ask for volunteers. Before implementing the program:

1. Develop some system of assigning tasks to parents. A bulletin board, file box, or notebook with assignments and directions is helpful, although you will need to give some verbal directions as well.
2. Assess the skills of the parents and try to assign activities accordingly.
3. Hold an orientation meeting to discuss tasks, classroom "rules" such as how and by whom children are disciplined. Of particular importance is insuring parents understand the family right to privacy and to avoid rumors outside the classroom.
4. Plan simple, but meaningful, activities such as storybook reading, art projects, snack supervision, and making materials for classroom activities.
5. Encourage and praise efforts of the parents.

Guidelines for Parent Conferences

1. ***In order that parents will have enough time to ask questions and discuss concerns, allow thirty minutes for each conference. Avoid interruptions.***
2. ***Observe the family's right to privacy.***
3. ***Use a comfortable space with adult chairs. Avoid creating a barrier by placing a desk between you and the family member.***
4. ***Be prepared. KNOW THE CHILD. KNOW CHILD DEVELOPMENT.***
5. ***Be warm and accepting.***
6. ***Open the conference with a brief and positive anecdote about the child. Note an activity which he or she truly enjoys in the classroom.***
7. ***Discuss the purpose of the conference.***
8. ***Review the conference sheet with the concrete examples provided. Encourage parent input throughout the discussion.***
9. ***Always discuss strengths before needs. Every child has strengths.***
10. ***Close the conference with concrete suggestions for school-related and parent-child activities. Again, emphasize the critical role of parent-child storybook reading and suggest some sources of books.***
11. ***Be prepared to offer assistance relative to questions about community resource needs.***
12. ***Remember, the focus of the conference is the child. If there are marital difficulties, refer the parent to an appropriate agency, but do not assume the role of counselor.***

Figure 2. ***General guidelines for parent-teacher conferences.***

Newsletters

Because of work and family responsibilities and transportation arrangements, many parents are unable to visit the classroom on a regular basis. The newsletter is an excellent resource for sharing information with parents relative to events which are occurring in the child's classroom. According to Harms and Cryer (1978), a newsletter has four objectives:

1. Keep parents informed about the activities conducted in the classroom every week;
2. Give parents insight into the educational purposes underlying these activities;
3. Enhance children's and parent's abilities to communicate with each other;
4. Reinforce and extend school learning into the home, especially in the area of language development (p.28).

With these objectives in mind, a weekly newsletter can be simply written in one or two pages. It should be given prior to the week the activities described will occur so that families will be prepared to discuss the activities with the child. The newsletter may include a brief description of the unit and related concepts being introduced, special fingerplays and songs, any special visitor to the classroom, and activities to be implemented. The newsletter may also include simple activities for parents and children to do at home, as well as information about community events of interest to the parent and child. Refer to Figure 3 for a sample newsletter.

Bulletin Boards

A parent bulletin board can serve as one mechanism for informing parents when parents visit the classroom. The board should be attractively arranged and uncluttered. A solid background is sometimes most helpful in highlighting the information displayed. The board should be located near the door at the eye level of the parents and be clearly labeled "Information for Families". Information displayed might include: daily schedules, birthday celebrations, unit events, field trip information, menus, community events, and brochures and handouts pertinent to topics in parenting. Stapling materials to the board will avoid the safety issue of children picking up or stepping on tacks. Remember to change the board frequently.

Handbooks

A parent handbook is helpful in keeping parents informed about the program. Disseminated at the beginning of the school year, it should be clearly and simply written and contain the following information:

- Staff names and phone numbers
- Educational philosophy and goals
- A description of the school environment, e.g., classroom design
- A description of the curriculum
- Hours of operation
- Daily schedule
- Calendar
- Attendance policies
- Health requirements
- Emergency procedures
- Clothing
- Articles to bring to school
- Information about snacks and meals
- Guidance policies
- Field trip procedures

Notes and "Happy Grams"

The happy gram serves as another, more spontaneous, form of written communication between the teacher and the family. Written on a simple sheet of paper, it simply states a happy event which the teacher would like to share with the parent. For example, a

Sample Newsletter

Dear Parents:

This week the children will be learning about a most important word in their lives—their NAMES. We will be searching for names in our storybooks and we will be creating names. The children will learn more about their own names and the names of their friends, families, and pets.

This is a song about names which we will be learning.

_____ is my name, is my name, is my name.
_____ is my name, What is your name?
(Tune: Mary Had a Little Lamb)

Many of the children are not yet ready to write their names with a pencil although they love to try. Because their fingers are not strong enough to hold a pencil and write on small lines, we are going to make our names in fingerpaint, with easel brushes, in the sandbox, and with many colors of playdough.

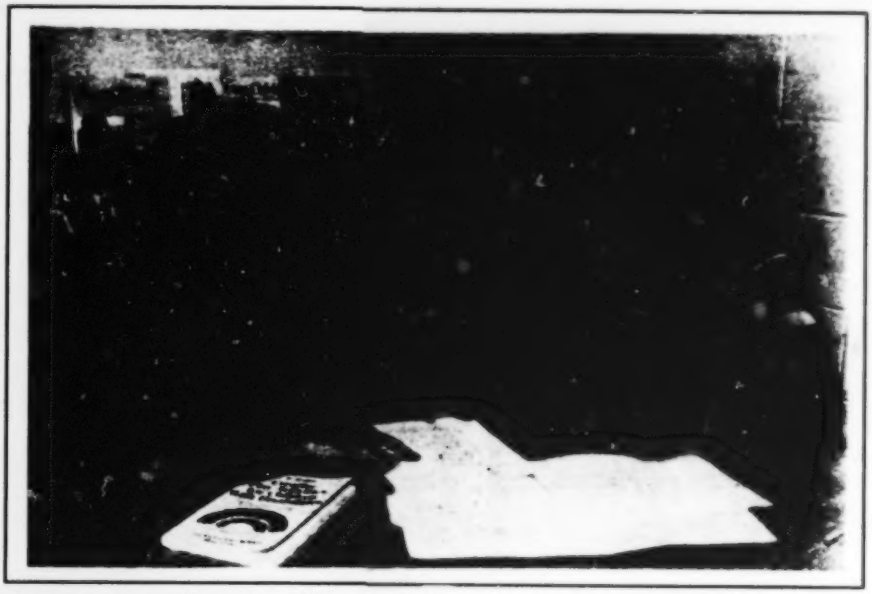
You may want to try these "name games" at home with your child.

- spread shaving cream on a tray or washable surface and encourage your child to make letters in the cream;
- "write" letters with fingers in the sand;
- use magnetic letters on your refrigerator;
- use washable markers and crayons to make letters on unlined paper;
- cut letters of your child's name out of newspaper advertisements and help your child glue them onto paper; and
- find letters of your child's name in road signs, restaurant signs, and other words you see as you travel down the road.

The most important word to any child as they begin to be interested in the words they see is his/her name. Let's help them recognize their name and if (s)he would like, "make" their name in fun and easy ways!

Warmly,

Figure 3. A sample newsletter.



A parent-teacher conference is one of the most effective methods of two-way communication that provides excellent opportunities for clarifying issues and examining goals and strategies.

child may be having great difficulty staying in a group circle for story. On the day when the child stays with the group and enjoys the story, the teacher may send home a note or happy gram to share the child's accomplishment with the family. A note from school does not have to be a negative experience!

Special Considerations For Families of Children With Special Needs

Teachers who participate in the mainstreaming of children with special needs into typical classroom settings must be aware of the tremendous impact which the special needs child may have on the parent's self-esteem and daily family life. By understanding the phases parents often experience in accepting the child's disability, teachers can better nurture the parent's sense of esteem and thereby nurture the child. Especially when first told, parents may experience denial of the disability, as well as blame, as the parent seeks to determine the reasons for the child's condition. Fear about the child's future and the role which the child will play in the family are common.

Families may experience recurrent guilt and grief. At some points, parents go through phases of withdrawal and rejection. Dealing with the emotions is ongoing for a family and different events often trigger these emotions. For example, watching a younger sibling develop normally may cause recurring grief about an older child with a disability (Bailey & Wolery, 1984).

These families need information relative to developmentally appropriate learning activities, guidance techniques, and ways to advocate for the child. In addition, the school staff should facilitate communication between parents of children who are typically developing and parents of children with disabilities. The Early Childhood Regional Training Centers are an excellent resource for videos and other training materials to assist both teachers and families in working with young children with special needs.

Final Note

The parent is the child's first and most important teacher. Parents and teachers must work together to set mutually agreed upon goals for insuring that each child is happy and has an opportunity to reach the maximum potential for learning. This document has addressed the more common techniques for involving families in the daily activities of the child at school. Additional methods of communication between the home and school which can be effective when properly implemented include advisory boards, toy lending libraries, parent resource lending libraries, parent study groups, parent support groups, and an active parent committee structure.

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